

Behavioral Tips

Proactive Tips:

1. Encourage communication- encourage your child to communicate for things they want via their most successful form of communication (i.e., verbal, device, sign or PECS)
 - a. The best time to do this is when you know they really want something and would be more willing to ask for it (e.g., Your child takes you by the hand and guides you to the refrigerator. You know they want cheese. Grab their device and ask them what they want. If they show resistance, hold your pointer finger over the button they need to push and wait for them to respond. If you know what they are capable of, hold them to that expectation. If they resist further, model by pushing the button for them and having them push it after you).
2. Catch them being good. Praise them when they do listen. When your child is having a calm moment, acknowledge it by saying something like, "I love your calm body and quiet voice. You are doing such a nice job sitting there"
 - a. If every time someone spoke to you it was to correct your behavior or tell you to stop doing something, eventually you would STOP listening to them
 - b. This leads to a cycle where we are talking at a child even more to get them to "listen"
 - c. Not only do kids stop listening to what you say, but they become more and more reluctant to engage with you even if you are doing something fun because they are expecting a negative response
 - d. If children hear positive statements, they are more likely to listen to what you say (because they are expecting something good). They will also be more likely to comply with corrective feedback in order to gain your praise.
3. When your child is playing, let them be the lead. This is the best time to get down at their level and enjoy them. Praise them for playing nicely and gently. Try not to give demands or direct them during this time.
4. Build in as many choices as you can through their day. This will make them feel like they have some control of their day ("Do you want the red cup or the blue one?")
5. Provide your child with multiple transition warnings throughout the day, especially when they are enjoying a highly preferred activity and that activity needs to end (e.g., "In 5 minutes it is time for lunch"; "In three minutes it is time for lunch"; "In one minute it is time for lunch")
 - a. Transitions from extremely preferred activities to non-preferred activities are very challenging (for everyone). Imagine if you were watching your favorite show and someone asked you to stop and wash the dishes. Similarly, transitioning from playing on an iPad to brushing teeth/bedtime routine can be very difficult. If possible, transition from a highly preferred activity (iPad) to a more moderately preferred activity (puzzles) before requesting the start of a more challenging task.
6. Use simple words and phrases. Give one direction at a time and keep it simple.
 - a. Many of our children have a short attention span and will only do the last thing they hear (i.e. "Don't run!" they might just hear, "Run!")
 - b. Try not to string directions together. Our children will become overwhelmed and may freeze up. Just give one simple direction at a time.
 - c. Be present when giving the direction. Calling across the room will most likely be ignored.

- d. Many of our children have delayed processing skills. Give them up to 10 seconds to process what you have asked before getting them to follow through.
7. Make sure you are only asking your child to do things you know they are capable of. When asking them to do something that is difficult, it may be easier to break the task down into smaller parts (e.g., “Make your bed” vs. “I made most of your bed. Help me put the pillows on”).
8. Always get your child’s attention prior to giving them a direction
 - a. Get down at their level to ensure that they have your eye contact or are at least looking in your direction.
 - b. Call their name to get their attention.
 - c. Make sure to limit distractions. Be mindful if they are in the middle of doing something they enjoy, they likely will either not hear you or ignore you.
 - d. When you give a direction, say it ONE time. You know they heard you when you follow the procedures above.
 - e. Follow through with what you asked them to do.
 - i. You can do this by providing a brief physical touch to their hand or shoulder to prompt them to do what you asked
 - ii. You can also use a point prompt (extend your pointer finger in the direction you want them to go or towards what you have asked them to do).
 - iii. Wait for your child to follow the direction. After a few minutes, you may give the direction one more time.
 - iv. When they do what you ask, make a big deal about it, praise them, give them a hug and let them know you are proud of them for listening!
 - v. If your child begins to engage in challenging behavior in response to the direction, please consider safety first. Don’t plan on tolerating or fighting through aggressive or self-injurious behavior in order to ensure your child follows through with a direction. Reach out to your child’s teacher and behavior consultant if this becomes an issue so that your child is not learning to engage in challenging behavior in order to escape from directions.
9. Use schedules and set up routines. Our children thrive on routines.
 - a. Try as much as possible to keep the daily routines the same (waking up, breakfast, lunch, dinner, snack, bath/shower, bed).
 - b. Use pictures and/or words to create the schedule and hang it on your wall/fridge so you and your child can refer to it throughout the day.
 - c. Try to arrange things so that your child isn’t going from something highly preferred to something least preferred or you will likely encounter difficulty (i.e., If your child loves iPad time and hates brushing their teeth, they will be less willing to give up the iPad to when it is time to brush their teeth).

How to Use Reinforcement:

Before reading these next bullets, please think about your own situation. Know your child and what you are capable of handling. Some of these recommendations can escalate a child. Safety should always come first. If you do not have the resources or energy to tackle these, IT IS OK. Contact your teacher or behavior consultant if you are interested but need additional support and guidance.

1. Reinforcement

- a. Reinforcement is a great tool that you can use to get your child to WANT to do things. If they are motivated to earn or work for a certain toy, activity or edible, you now have a powerful tool in your back pocket.
- b. Rules for reinforcers
 - i. Reinforcers are in YOUR control. You are the one who dictates when and how long your child can have a reinforcer.
 - ii. If your child has free access to it already, it needs to become limited and under your rules (this means that their favorite toy, electronic, food item now goes on top of the fridge or in locked box until it is earned)
 - iii. The balance between expectation and reward needs to be in your child's favor. It needs to be worth it for them.
 - iv. Set up your rules ahead of time and let your child know what the expectations are. Remember you should be asking things of your child YOU KNOW they are capable of doing (i.e., "If you brush your teeth, you can have 10 minutes on the iPad with your favorite app. If you do not brush your teeth, that's ok, but you will NOT get the iPad back until you do what I have asked")
 1. Remember to break things down. If toothbrushing is very difficult for your child, you may want to start small and build from there (i.e., "If you let me touch the toothbrush to your teeth for 5 seconds, you can have the iPad for 10 minutes).
 - v. When you set up this kind of contingency, you are in control. No matter what you child does (whines, cries, displays problem behavior, they will NOT get the iPad because they have not followed the direction you have given). Please consider safety first. Working through whining and crying is reasonable, but attempting to work through aggressive or self-injurious behavior is not. If you are experiencing this issue, please reach out to your child's teacher and behavior consultant for advice.
 - vi. If you know ahead of time that what you are asking them to do will upset them, be prepared to follow through and not give in. **If you already know that IF they show challenging behavior or engage in dangerous behavior, you will likely give, then it is best to not to give them the direction in the first place. They are only learning that their challenging behavior gets them out of things.**
 1. For example, if you know that if you tell your child they need to brush their teeth and they will likely become upset and could pose a danger to themselves or others, it is better to avoid that situation all together than to get them in the bathroom, start to try to brush their teeth and sometime during the struggle, you give in for safety reasons. In this scenario, your child has learned what they need to do to avoid brushing teeth and they will likely do the same thing again because it worked for them. See recommendations above about breaking things down into smaller expectations; in this scenario, you could brush their teeth in sections, giving them breaks and/or reinforcement between the sections. Reach out to your child's teacher and consultant for advice.
2. Allow reinforcers to work for you. Set your child up for success. Think of simple ways throughout the day that you can bring that reinforcer into play.

- a. i.e., If waiting is very difficult and you know that your child LOVES green M&Ms, the next time they ask you for something, bring out the green M&M and say, "I love how you asked me, I need to you to wait (1 second, 2 seconds- keep it short and simple). If they wait, immediately praise them and give them that green M&M. If they become upset and show challenging behavior, they do not get the green M&M, but they can try again later. Remember, you are in control of when and how they receive it.
- b. You can apply this to waiting, getting them to accept, "No", sharing a toy, asking for help, or anything else that you can "teach in the moment". Try to take advantage of naturalistic opportunities as they come up throughout the day.
3. Be careful about using toys, electronics or edibles as bribery
 - a. Reinforcement is different than bribery. If you show your child what they can earn if they listen to you, you are using reinforcement. If you only bring out the toy, electronic or food after they are already upset (or starting to get upset), this is more bribery.
4. Try not to threaten punishments. If you tell your child you are going to take something away and it never happens, they will learn that you really don't mean what you say.

Other Resources:

1. Contact your Care Coordinator. Let them know what you are struggling with. There may be other things they can link you to in order to provide more help during this time.
2. If you think you may need to call 911 during a challenging behavior crisis, call your local police department ahead of time, explain your situation and ask for an idea of what things might look like if they do need to come.
3. Call/email your child's teacher or consultant. We are ready and willing to provide you with more personalized tips to help you and your child during this time of need